

## **MC 202 Titles and Descriptions for Spring 2021**

*\*\*It is recommended that you choose a few options in case your 1<sup>st</sup> choice is full.\*\**

**Sec. 001 – MW 8:00-9:50 a.m.**

**“The Founding of America: The American Civil War (1850-1870)”**

**Prof. Eric Petrie**

We will examine the way in which social science studies the origin of our political and social regime by examining the events of the American Civil War. The centerpiece of the study will be a literary-historical account of the events of the Civil War written by Shelby Foote. His work will be compared to various social science accounts of those same events. Our purpose will be to ascertain what is the true origin of the American regime? How can it best be understood?

**Sec. 002 – TTH 10:20 a.m.-12:10 p.m.**

**“Dilemmas of Science and Technology in Society and Policy: From the Twitterverse to the Universe”**

**Prof. Sharlissa Moore**

Understanding the policy, legal, ethical, and social implications of technologies and the use of scientific evidence in decision-making is an essential part of being a citizen in the modern world. The first part of this course will examine the roles of personal technologies and the Internet in our daily lives. What is the responsibility of companies, such as YouTube and Twitter, versus governments for regulating hate speech and criminal activity on social media? The second part of the course will explore the use of scientific evidence in policymaking and value conflicts in scientific data collection. How has scientific evidence informed public health decisions during the novel coronavirus pandemic, and is medical research changing as a result? Why have astronomers seeking to build research telescopes in Hawaii come into conflict with indigenous communities? What ethical issues are at stake in research conducted on marginalized communities? The third part of the course will focus on the intersection of science, technology, and the environment. For example, can renewable energy solve climate change? Does the herbicide Roundup cause cancer, and should it be banned in backyard use? Students will take away overarching theoretical and analytical perspectives and research methodologies for understanding scientific evidence, personal technologies, and technological infrastructure in society and policy today.

**Sec. 003 – MW 10:20 a.m.-12:10 p.m.**

**“It’s the Principle of the Thing: The Law, Ethics, Criminality, and the Global Society”**

**Prof. Lisa Barksdale-Shaw**

Treating each text as a legal case, we will examine closely the nature, the manipulation, and the presentation of legal, ethical, and criminal concepts from ancient Greece and Roman works, Italian treatises, contemporary African writings to other world writers. While attending to culture, economics, and geography, our investigation will complicate and underscore the ethical

dilemmas, moral conundrums, and criminal contemplations found within these narratives. As our main objective, we will instigate, construct, and critique individually—and perhaps corporately—a way to develop our own principles to navigate current socio-political concerns.

**Sec. 004 – MW 10:20 a.m.-12:10 p.m.**  
**“Political Leadership in the Twentieth Century”**  
**Prof. Benjamin Lorch**

This course will study some of the outstanding world leaders of the last hundred years, who led their countries through the crises of the twentieth century, and became the founders of new political and social orders. Possible case studies include Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid in South Africa, Jawaharlal Nehru and the founding of India, Kemal Atatürk and the founding of Turkey, and others. Each student will also conduct independent research about a leader of his or her own choosing. While we will be studying countries and historical periods that are different from our own, our aim is not only to learn about each individual country, but also to use the case studies to investigate broader issues about politics and leadership. Readings will include biographical studies, social science research, and political philosophy.

**Sec. 005 – MW 12:40-2:30 p.m.**  
**“Utopianism”**  
**Prof. Louis Hunt**

The notion of utopia plays a crucial but underestimated role in thinking critically about serious alternatives to contemporary social and political ideas and practices. The purpose of utopian thinking is to use both reason and imagination to break through the stereotyped assumptions about social and political possibilities that hamper real change. But utopianism is open to the charge of fostering unrealistic expectations about the prospects of change, which can lead to destructive forms of social and political experimentation. In this course, we will critically explore the various dimensions of utopian thought in the light of the social and political challenges facing us today.

**Sec. 006 – MW 3:00-4:50 p.m.**  
**“American Cultural Nationalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**  
**Prof. Stephen Rohs**

This course will examine the ways that nationalism has been constructed in the last two decades in the United States, as well as the ways that national identity shapes power relations and conflict. Course readings will include theories on nationalism, culture, and society, as well as several case studies that will help to explore particular incidents of conflict shaped by contested national identities. Because nationalism also is often implicated in other forms of identity, including race, gender, religion, class, sexuality, and citizenship, those themes will be woven throughout the texts we study. A semester-long project will allow students to explore the way national and other identities function in diverse contexts that they discover in their research.

**Sec. 007 – MW 3:00-4:50 p.m.**  
**“Food, Agriculture & Society”**  
**Prof. Daniel Ahlquist**

We all eat, but how many of us stop to consider where, how, and by whom our food is produced, how it gets to us, or why it matters? In this interdisciplinary, writing-intensive research seminar, we will examine the technological, political-ecological, economic, and cultural transformation of our modern food system – the collective networks and processes through which we produce, transport, process, market, distribute and consume our food – since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students will conduct research and write a final research paper on an issue of their choice related to our modern food system.

**Sec. 008 – MW 5:00-6:50 p.m.**  
**“It’s the Principle of the Thing: The Law, Ethics, Criminality, and the Global Society”**  
**Prof. Lisa Barksdale-Shaw**

Treating each text as a legal case, we will examine closely the nature, the manipulation, and the presentation of legal, ethical, and criminal concepts from ancient Greece and Roman works, Italian treatises, contemporary African writings to other world writers. While attending to culture, economics, and geography, our investigation will complicate and underscore the ethical dilemmas, moral conundrums, and criminal contemplations found within these narratives. As our main objective, we will instigate, construct, and critique individually—and perhaps corporately—a way to develop our own principles to navigate current socio-political concerns.

**Sec. 010 – TTH 3:00-4:20 p.m.**  
**Professor TBD**

**Sec. 011 – TTH 10:20 a.m.-12:10 p.m.**  
**“For the Sake of the Children”**  
**Prof. Jennifer Sykes**

How do we care for our young citizens? What do we do to ensure that children in the US are looked after properly – and who decides what is appropriate (or inappropriate) child rearing, anyway? In many ways, the answer to these questions are moving targets, changing over time and answered differently by different communities. This course on *child welfare* examines how we as a society understand and reimagine the special life phase called childhood. It will focus on the ways in which society protects children – and sometimes, how society fails to protect children. We will study historical and contemporary issues relating to vulnerable children in the US, focusing on children experiencing the trauma of poverty, forced labor, violence, racism, dislocation, or abandonment. Our readings will explore different historical eras in the US, focusing on the changing roles of parents, community, and government institutions in ensuring child well-being. We will examine readings on juvenile delinquency, the orphan trains, the “discovery” of child abuse, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and the debate on “children in cages” at our nation’s border.

In this course, students will develop their abilities to craft research questions, identify useful tools in answering those questions, and write research essays. Central to our course will be a deeper consideration of how we think about child well-being. Students will be asked to consider significant facets of child welfare: how we measure it, how to locate data on a variety of variables relating to it, and how to use that data in research papers. Students will propose and develop independent research projects relating to the overall course themes of child welfare. Independent projects may be on historical or contemporary issues, on topics that might include child protection, family law, child poverty, child development, parenting, education, child labor, and child rights.

**Sec. 012 – TTH 12:40-2:30 p.m.**

**“Feeding the 9 Billion: Food Security in Global Context”**

**Prof. Hashini Dissanayake**

This course is designed for students interested in learning about the critical global issue of food security, a key focus in development practice. It will include an in-depth investigation of the concept and related ideas and discuss their use and abuse in the broader development practice and policy. The course will employ multiple approaches to learning including class lectures, contemporary readings, creative and analytical writing, class discussions, etc.

**Sec. 013 – TTH 12:40-2:30 p.m.**

**“The Dilemma of Genres in U.S. Political Expression”**

**Prof. Connie Hunt**

Our thematic focus for the semester will be to explore the problem of genres of U.S. political expression and the U.S. regime. Our main texts in this inquiry are founding documents of the U.S. regime, U.S. Supreme Court cases, works of literature, film, history and journalism. We will move back and forth between considering the tools and questions of good writing and reading complex texts broadly understood, which explores the problem of political expression in the U.S. regime. In considering this problem, we will reflect upon when and where history is well used and poorly used, how community affects the understanding of history and the regime and vice versa; how identity affects history and regime and vice versa.

**Sec. 014 – TTH 3:00-4:50 p.m.**

**“Religion in the United States: Uniting and Dividing People”**

**Prof. Gene Burns**

This course examines how religion can both unite and divide Americans. Vibrant communities in the United States consist of religious groups from *multiple* traditions, as well as very secular groups. For many people, a particular religion is a source of joy and comfort; for others it feels oppressive.

This course does not assume deep knowledge about any particular religious tradition and is not a course about theology or religious beliefs but about the social reality of religion in the U.S. And so when we study religion as a lived experience, we are often also discussing what it means to be part of a community, as well as ethnicity, race, immigration, and/or politics and inequality. I very much hope the course includes Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus, and other religious students, as well as atheists and those who aren't sure what they believe. The instructor's standpoint will be that neither religion nor atheism is always good or always bad, but that a sense of community and working across social boundaries are both important. I also take the perspective, as implied above, that a given religion is not simply the set of beliefs and practices that its clergy or other leaders proclaim. In real life, people use and interpret the same religion in very different ways; and so I generally assume that no leaders, and no one in general, has a monopoly on what a particular religion is about. (I would say the same about being nonreligious: That means different things to different people.)

It is impossible in one semester to address everything about religious and secular Americans in any depth. The readings will probably partly reflect the demography of the United States, that is, with a bit more attention to the larger groups, which would include varieties of Christians and nonreligious people. (Even U.S. Christianity is very diverse, for instance, given the rich traditions of Black Christianity and the large differences between Catholicism and other Christian denominations.) We will also address American Judaism and Islam, and have at least some attention on smaller groups. And when we examine Christianity, the aim is to appreciate both how many Christians see themselves, but also why some Americans are critical of what they see as an overly dominant Christian presence. You won't agree with everything we read or discuss. But I hope the course helps religious and secular Americans learn about each other, respectfully, even though that it is often personally challenging.

One course like this can only scratch the surface: If interested, students are strongly encouraged also to pursue courses in the Religious Studies Department and in MSU's Muslim Studies and Jewish Studies programs.

**Sec. 015 – TTH 3:00-4:50 p.m.**

**“Feeding the 9 Billion: Food Security in Global Context”**

**Prof. Hashini Dissanayake**

This course is designed for students interested in learning about the critical global issue of food security, a key focus in development practice. It will include an in-depth investigation of the concept and related ideas and discuss their use and abuse in the broader development practice and policy. The course will employ multiple approaches to learning including class lectures, contemporary readings, creative and analytical writing, class discussions, etc.